Spring 2008

Family context of children and youths experiencing online interpersonal victimization

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FAMILY CONTEXT OF CHILDREN AND YOUTHS EXPERIENCING ONLINE INTERPERSONAL VICTIMIZATION

BY

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B.A., Psychology, University of New Hampshire, 2006

THESIS

Submitted to the University of New Hampshire

In Partial Fulfillment of

The Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts

in

Sociology

May, 2008

This thesis has been examined and approved.

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DEDICATION

Every day when I wake up, I experience an exquisite joy – the joy of being Brian Michael Hinchee - and I ask myself in rapture "What wonderful things will Brian Michael Hinchee accomplish today?" This is why I have decided to dedicate this thesis to myself. Congratulations on a job well-done sir. I wish you the best of luck as you say good-bye to the countless long days you have spent in the treacherous, dark, and hot dungeon that is McConnell Hall and head out in search of greener pastures and newer, greater adventures.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would first like to thank David Finkelhor, who first sparked my interest in Internet victimization when he spoke about his life's research in Sociology 901: Proseminar my first semester. Until this point I was clueless about what to write a thesis about. David was extremely helpful in helping me to obtain copies of the survey questionnaire as well as the Youth Internet Safety Survey data set, which became my best friend in my final two semesters of graduate school.

I would also like to thank Cesar Rebellon for allowing me to begin a draft of my thesis for the term paper in his Crime & Conflict class. Cesar was one of my favorite professors that I met during my undergraduate adventure at UNH. I want to thank Cesar for sharing his passion of Sociology and Criminology with me which is what ultimately led me to attend graduate school. (He was also nice enough to write me a letter of recommendation, which helped me get in!).

Sally Ward was also extremely helpful to me in the process of formulating my original research proposal. She took an interest in my work and provided me with very valuable feedback. I was very sad that she was on sabbatical this year and could not help me further!

Finally, I am very thankful for Richard Ormrod, who was the Aspirin for my statistical headache in the final stages of data analysis.

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ABSTRACT

FAMILY CONTEXT OF CHILDREN AND YOUTHS EXPERIENCING ONLINE INTERPERSONAL VICTIMIZATION

by

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University of New Hampshire, May, 2008

Internet victimization of children is a recent phenomenon that is now widely studied. The various predictors of Internet victimization have received less attention. My study measures Online Interpersonal Victimization, which includes harassment and sexual solicitations. I analyze victimization using the Family Context model and Routine Activities and Lifestyles Theory to examine how relationships with parents contribute to youth victimization.

This study uses 2005 data from the Youth Internet Safety Survey (YISS-2), a nationally representative sample of youth Internet users and their parents. Survey participants (N=1500) were regular Internet users between the ages of 10 and 17. I hypothesized that poor family relationships would increase victimization likelihood. Several of my original hypotheses were supported. Regression analyses revealed that female and older youths were more likely to report online interpersonal victimization. However, the stronger predictors were high parental conflict and physical abuse by parents, both of which more than doubled the chances of reporting an

Online Interpersonal Victimization. I conclude with recommendations for how parents can keep youths safe while using the Internet.

INTRODUCTION

Children and youths are at the highest risk for several types of victimizations (Finkelhor, 2008). They are at increased risk of experiencing physical, emotional, sexual, indirect, property, and Internet victimizations. Internet victimizations include unwanted exposure to pornography and hateful material, as well as harassment and sexual solicitations.

There has been an increased focus from the professional and scientific domains on the problems that children face (Finkelhor, 1997). Finkelhor (1997) credits the disintegration of the cultural veil of family privacy as one reason as to why research into family violence has increased. It is now much easier to study the prevalence of widespread violence - including violence within the family - that commonly occurs.

The criminological and sociological literatures have investigated the relationship between family context and delinquency for over thirty years (Cohen & Felson, 1979; Gottfredson & Hirschi, 1990; Rebellon, 2002). Literature investigating the relationship between family context and victimization has been studied less thoroughly. However, these two literatures discover many of the same conclusions. For instance, Lauritsen et al. (1991) found that family context is a significant predictor of increased levels of violent victimization. Several aspects of family context, including parental conflict, monitoring, and abuse, appear to be associated with delinquency and several types of victimization. Research

on the relationship of family context and Internet victimization has been even scarcer. The topic of Internet victimization is still fairly new but is beginning to receive more scholarly attention. This is partially due to the increasing number of youth Internet users and recent media attention on severe cases of Internet victimization.

The number of children and youths who regularly use the Internet is steadily increasing every year. As far back as 2003, in the United States, approximately 23 million children and youths between the ages of 6 and 17 years reported using the Internet at home (Cho & Cheon, 2005). The US Department of Justice estimated that in 2005, there were close to 70 million children and youths using the Internet (Gillis, 2005). These children and youths are using the Internet for a wide array of reasons including the completion of school work, to keeping in touch with friends, and even online blogging and dating (Affonso, 1999; Corporation for Public Broadcasting, 2002). Unfortunately, these youths are also especially likely to be exposed many unwanted things while using the Internet. Some of these negative experiences include unwanted exposure to pornography, violence, harassment, hateful material and Internet predators (Gallagher, 2005; Wolak, Mitchell, & Finkelhor, 2007).

Studies utilizing national probability samples of youths who report regular Internet use have discovered high rates of several types of victimization (Mitchell, Wolak, & Finkelhor, 2003; Mitchell, Finkelhor, &

Wolak, 2005b; Mitchell, Finkelhor, & Wolak, 2007b). The prevalence of these victimizations illustrates the need for continued research aimed at discovering various predictors and risk factors. Cases involving perpetrators of Internet sex crimes are increasing as rapidly as the number of youths using the Internet (Tyson, 1998; Wolak, Finkelhor, Mitchell, & Ybarra, 2008). Most of these cases are not likely to end with the offenders getting caught or arrested. Internet victimization is in need of much research and attention from policy makers, law enforcement agencies, and families. The purpose of my research is to determine which aspects of family context are indicators of youth Internet victimization. I aim to discover what patterns of interactions within family life may place youths at higher risk for Internet victimization. My research will better equip parents, future researchers, and policy makers with strategies to keep youths safe on the Internet.

CHAPTER I

BACKGROUND

Theory

Since child victimization research is fairly new and has developed out of concern for the dangers facing our children, most studies have been exploratory and have concentrated on generating national statistics of rates of victimization. Less emphasis has been placed upon studying risk factors and generating sound theories of victimization. Many of the survey instruments include measures that are not yet validated and accomplishing this is the goal of many researchers in this area. A few authors have proposed theoretical models aimed at understanding the mechanisms placing many youths at risk for certain types of victimization (Cho & Cheon, 2005; Schreck & Fisher, 2004). These models have included the variables of family structure, attachment, monitoring, parental abuse, and parent to child safety communications on rates of Internet victimization. My study will include several of these family context concepts as well as several measures of Internet victimization.

Routine Activities and Lifestyles Theory

Routine Activities theory is one theory of crime and victimization that focuses on environmental factors (Cohen & Felson, 1979; Schreck & Fisher, 2004). There are three key elements that predict higher likelihoods of violent victimization. The theory suggests that the presence of motivated offenders, the presence of attractive targets, exposure to delinquent peers, and a lack of guardianship are the best predictors of violent victimization (Schreck & Fisher, 2004). Family structure is another component of RAT, the belief being that un-married parents are less capable of properly monitoring their children.

Finkelhor (1997) acknowledged that this theory is better suited for certain groups of victims, namely adolescent boys. It could be the case that youths who engage in risky behaviors, such as alcohol and drug use, staying out late, frequenting dangerous areas, and disobeying parents, are more at risk for victimization. This theory cannot explain why youths who do not engage in risky behaviors are still victimized. This theory also cannot explain why younger children and victims of intra-family victimizations are at risk (Finkelhor et al., 2005). This theory does, however, indicate that the presence of offenders and improper monitoring are associated with certain types of victimization. This theory has yet to be applied to Internet victimization. What it would suggest is that youths who are exposed to more offenders due to their high frequency Internet use,

who are poorly monitored, and have divorced parents should have increased risk of Internet victimization.

Family Social Context Model

Cho and Cheon (2005) developed a theoretical model linking family social contexts of Internet use to unwanted Internet exposure. The authors of the theory explain family context as having healthy relationships with parents that include guidance and positive influences. The family context approach relies on the effects of parental influences on Internet victimization because parents play such an important role in the everyday lives of their children. However, this study only measured a limited number of Internet victimizations, namely exposure to negative content. Negative content included viewing pornography, violent games, hate speech, and gambling sites. The absence of online harassment and sexual solicitations is one weakness of this study. This model is useful, however, because it shows that parental attachment and guidance are associated with certain types of Internet victimization.

Linking Family Context and Internet Victimization

What I am proposing in my research on Internet victimization is a broader focus that includes additional family context and Internet victimization measures. I will use measures similar to Cho and Cheon's measures of family cohesion and parental control. I call these measures family conflict and parental monitoring. My research will build upon this

model by including new measures of Internet victimization. I hope to show that attachment and monitoring are also associated with online harassment and solicitations. I will also include measures of the routine activities and lifestyles theory, that were used Schreck & Fisher (2004) used to study violent victimization, in my analysis of Internet victimization. I use measures of monitoring and high Internet use. I do not include a measure of association with delinquent peers. My use of a large, nationally representative sample and family context measures provided by youths are improvements upon previous Internet victimization research. I also include a measure of parental abuse similar to the one used by Shields and Cicchetti (2001) for peer abuse. The potential links between parental abuse and victimization are explored in the sections that follow.

I use Mitchell et al.'s (2007a) Online Interpersonal Victimization measure which includes both harassment and sexual solicitations. I do not include a measure of exposure to negative images since harassment and sexual solicitations have been found to be associated with more severe consequences for youths. For instance, Wells (2008) found that youth victims of online sexual exploitation were more likely to have a variety of DSM-IV diagnoses than youths with other Internet problems.

Review of Literature

The new ease of studying the once intimate aspects of family life has produced a vast amount of literature studying the effects of family context on youth behavior. There has been substantial research linking family context to delinquency (Han & Waldfogel, 2007; Rebellon, 2002; Sarkadi, Kristiansson, Oberklaid, & Brember, 2008) and now research linking family context to victimization is quite common as well. Studies with this focus assess the relationships among family structure, family cohesion or attachment, parental monitoring, parental maltreatment and domestic abuse, and the likelihood of various victimization types. Some of these studies have focused on all types of victimization, while others focused on one specific type of victimization. Internet victimization studies were mostly aimed at generating national statistics of the prevalence of these victimizations. Some authors have developed theoretical models to discover the mechanisms that place many youths at risk. These findings of will be explained in detail in the sections that follow. There are sections for delinquency risk factors, victimization prevalence, victimization risk factors, technological Changes, and Internet victimization prevalence, and potential Internet victimization risk factors.

Delinquency Risk Factors

The prevailing conclusions from research on family factors and delinquency are that youths from divorced homes are more prone to

delinquent acts than youths from intact families. Rebellon (2002) conducted an exhaustive literature review on the relationship between broken homes and delinquency. His study simultaneously compared three criminological theories, control perspective, learning perspective, and strain perspective and included many measures of family structure that were not included in previous studies. The family structure of youths was further separated to compare distant divorce, recent divorce, and the presence of step-parents in both types of divorce.

Using the National Youth Survey, Rebellon explored the relationship among commitment, involvement, attachment and youth delinquency. The measure of attachment was one component of Hirschi's social bonding theory. Hirschi suggests that delinquency results from the inhibition to form strong attachments to parents or caregivers. Since broken homes result in the loss of one biological parent, children with strong attachments to one parent will be more prone to delinquency than children with strong attachments to both parents. However, there was no support for social bonding mediating the relationship between family structure and delinquency. The other two theories offered more support for the relationship between family structure and delinquency.

The support for learning theory indicated that the relationship between peer connections and youth delinquency is more relevant than family connections. This suggests that youths dealing with the long-term

impact of early divorce could be associating with delinquent peers, which influences their involvement in later life delinquency (Rebellon, 2002). This exposure to other delinquent youths is partially the result from improper parental monitoring. Poor parental monitoring is also likely to expose children to greater risk of various types of victimization, as is evident from the findings of the studies that follow.

Strain theory was also supported, indicating that certain types of family structural changes can cause a disjunction between youth expectations and realities, and their frustrations may lead to delinquency. Distant divorce, taking place early in the child's life, was related to three different types of delinquency. Recent remarriage was associated with status offending, and long-term stepparent presence was related to violent offending (Rebellon, 2002). Recent remarriage may be associated with higher rates of status offending because children experience emotional turmoil in the transition to a new family form. The results of this study indicate that family structure is less associated with delinquency than family context. Victimization studies have also found that victimization is more related to family context and not family structure.

Literature studying the quality of step-families has found that family quality is worse, strain and stress are common, especially with regard to decisions over stepchildren, and that remarriages are more likely to end in divorce than first marriages (Booth & Edwards, 1992; Mason, 2007).

Children of divorced parents also experience a wide array of negative outcomes ranging social and academic problems, to poorer ratings of well-being (Kelly & Emery, 2007), to economic disadvantages, and to a greater likelihood of exposure to traumatic life events (Amato, 2000) when compared to children in stable families. It is very likely that these aspects of poor family quality are associated with the involvement of youths in several types of delinquent activities.

Family Context Risk Factors

Unlike findings from the delinquency research, family structure does not appear to be associated with victimization risk. Family context is, however. Parents who are aware of what their children do, who they hang out with, and where they are act as a protector from the various harms children face (Mitchell & Finkelhor, 2001). One predictor of negative child outcomes is a weak attachment to parents or weak family cohesion. Being in a good relationship with parents, a relationship that is categorized with emotional warmth and caring, serves to protect youths from engaging in delinquent activities and being at risk for many types of victimization (Shreck & Fisher, 2004). Regardless of their composition, families that have positive, close, well communicated and caring relationships are best suited to protect their children from a wide array of negative consequences. Any research on the subject in the future should

seek to uncover what other family characteristics are able to protect their children from many types of victimization.

Parental communication with children about Internet safety is associated with Internet victimizations, at least unwanted exposure (Cho & Cheon, 2005). If parents discuss Internet safety with their children and establish boundaries of what is and what is not acceptable to view, victimization rates are lowered significantly. By taking an active interest in the lives of their children, parents can be instrumental in protecting their children from victimization.

Victimization Prevalence

The first glimpse at the prevalence of various types of victimizations for children in the United States was a result of the Juvenile Victimization Questionnaire (JVQ). This questionnaire was created to capture several additional victimization measures not included in previous indices. The questionnaire asked youths about all types of victimizations, including non-violent victimizations and victimizations not generally thought to be crimes.

The final sample of the study included 2,030 children and youths between the ages of 2 and 17. Nearly 71% of youths reported at least one form of victimization in the previous year (Finkelhor, Ormrod, Turner, & Hamby, 2005). More than 50% of the youths reported being the victim of an assault. Slightly less than 10% reported a sexual victimization, the most

common of which were perpetrated by acquaintances of the youth. Finally, child maltreatment, property victimizations, and indirect victimizations were reported by 14%, 25%, and 33% of the youths, respectively (Finkelhor et al., 2005).

Recent research by the same author focused on the prevalence of multiple victimizations reported by youths. The term "poly-victim" was applied to youths experiencing four or more victimizations in the previous year. The results indicated that nearly 70% of youths reported a single victimization and another 20% of youths reported four or more (Finkelhor, Ormrod, & Turner, 2007). A relatively small portion, 7% of the youths, actually reported seven or more victimizations in the previous year.

Victimization Risk Factors

Finkelhor (2007) discovered that "poly-victims" seemed to have several things in common. These victims also reported living in one-parent homes and experiencing more stressful life events. This finding suggests that youths who reported non-intact family structure and poor family context, are much more likely to be at risk of several types of victimization.

The previously mentioned study by Schreck and Fisher (2004) found that two measures of family context were associated with violent victimizations. The measures of poor family context and stressful life events associated with increased risk included parental arguing and substance abuse. Families characterized with close and understanding relationships

tend are able to properly guard youths from violent. On the contrary, children who feel emotionally alienated from parents are at increased risk of victimization (Shreck & Fisher, 2004). The authors suggest that alienation from parents may cause youths to act unruly and be insulting to others since they feel unattached to anyone. These behaviors place youths in situations where violent victimization is more likely to occur. The results do indicate that stronger bonds of attachment and good parental monitoring can significantly reduce victimization rates.

Shields and Cicchetti (2001) studied the relationship between risk of victimization by peers and disrupted emotional reactions resulting from parental maltreatment and abuse. This study used an inner-city sample of children enrolled in a summer camp. There were two groups of children matched on age, income, family structure, and family size. There were 169 children identified as being maltreated, and the comparison group was made up of 98 children. During the camp, children were studied by camp counselors and rated on their "victim-like" behavior and emotional regulation scales using the Mount Hope Bully-Victim questionnaire.

Parental maltreatment and abuse were significant predictors of peer victimization. They discovered that parental abuse is not only physically damaging, but psychologically damaging as well. Abuse can disturb the emotional regulation of children, causing anxiety and depression, which increases the risk of many types of victimization. The

internalization of the label of "victim" is what places kids at much greater risk of being bullied at school. This could also explain why many kids are bullied extensively both on and offline. The authors believe that bullies take advantage of the weakness they perceive in some kids. This could also explain why some kids are targeted for solicitations by Internet predators.

Previous research has also found an association between maltreated children, high levels of fear, anxiety, and arousal, and high victimization by peers. Early maltreatment by parents hinders the emotional development of children and places them at greater risk of being victimized by peers who recognize this emotional vulnerability. Other findings have indicated that parental deviance is associated with ineffective monitoring. It seems that adults who abuse their own children may have limited abilities to supervise and protect them. Deviant parents are less likely to supervise and protect their children, which increases children's risk of victimization (Mitchell & Finkelhor, 2001). Abusive parents may be colder and harsher in their parenting styles, which results in greater vulnerability to all types of crime victimization.

Essentially, the choices that adults make with regard to their own lifestyles simultaneously affect them and their children. Mitchell also found that the lifestyles of parents may foster bad environments and place children at greater risk of Internet victimization (Mitchell et al., 2005b).

Technological Changes

There is more concern lately for understanding the dangers our children face while using the Internet. These include physical, cognitive, and social developmental problems (Affonso, 1999; Cho & Cheon, 2005). People seem to worry about the consequences of high Internet use as much as they used to be about the consequences of high television watching. Various social and media changes expose people to advances in knowledge, but also to new risks. Enhanced computer and Internet technologies have had a massive impact on society. What many people do not realize is that the Internet is a double-edged sword that brings many benefits as well as many consequences (Cho & Cheon, 2005). It has had a particularly huge impact on child victimization. Children are especially likely to experience its harmful consequences because they are less aware of its negative consequences. This is especially true for youths who are younger, use the Internet less frequently, and are not as technologically savvy (Yan, 2006).

Television news shows that expose and capture would-be Internet predators bring about many questions of their fairness and utility. However, these programs are beneficial because they have drawn national attention to the problem of youth Internet victimization. One such Television news show, N.B.C.'s *To Catch a Predator* with Chris Hansen, has shown the public that there are serious risks to our children on the Internet.

This show uses elaborate sting operations to bring potential Internet 'predators' into the public spotlight, and ultimately into police custody. Many of the individuals who were caught have lost their jobs, received costly fines, and even served jail time. Over 200 individuals have been caught on tape showing up at houses where police officers are posing as 14-year old children. The professions of these individuals range from doctors, to lawyers, to priests, to every branch of the military (Hansen, 2007). This show gives the public the notion that these men are sneaky, deviant, repeated sexual offenders that are targeting helpless children. In fact, research on child molesters illustrates that they are a very diverse group of individuals that cannot be categorized with such a one-dimensional label (Wolak et al., 2008).

Thanks to media attention and advances in technology, many local, state, and federal law enforcement agencies have been able to adopt similar methods, including sting operations, to apprehend potential Internet victimizers. Mitchell (2005a) concluded that these proactive investigations can be quite successful and should continue to be conducted by law enforcement agencies on all levels.

Due to the sensitive nature of this research, few empirical studies have assessed the offenders of Internet sex crimes. The few studies conducted have found that offenders differ significantly from the profile shown on the CBS show. Situations involving online predators searching

for innocent teens seem to be much less common. The truth is, many teens are willingly engaging in sexual conversations with older individuals who they often know. Mitchell (2005b) studied offenders of Internet sex crimes who were acquainted with the victims that they targeted using data from the National Juvenile Online Victimization Survey (NJOVS). This survey contained arrest data from law enforcement agencies throughout the United States. In total, in the year 2000, there were 2,577 arrests for Internet sex crimes against minors. An estimated 460 of these cases, nearly 20%, involved family members or friends as the perpetrators (Mitchell et al., 2005b). These offenders were overwhelmingly male, older than 26 years old, had annual incomes of less than $50,000 per year, and had finished high school or had some college education. The victims of family abuse were predominantly female, were generally between 13 and 17, whereas victims of acquaintance abuse were predominantly males (Mitchell et. al., 2005b).

These arrests represent only a small portion of the crimes being perpetrated as they do not match the high number of solicitations reported by youths. This study only analyzed a fraction of these cases, which illustrates the seriousness of the situation. Self-report surveys are not a feasible means of collecting reports from perpetrators of sex crimes against minors. Only improved law enforcement tactics of locating

offenders will provide a more accurate picture of the true prevalence of these crimes.

Internet Victimization Prevalence

Research indicates that parents and children do not commonly have discussions about Internet safety; largely because parents underestimate the dangers their children face (Cho & Cheon, 2005). Some of the risks facing youths include exposure to pornography and Internet predators (Gallagher, 2005; Wolak, et al., 2007) as well as violence, bullying, hateful material, and gambling (Cho & Cheon, 2005).

For many children victimized elsewhere, the computer is merely an extension of the harm they experience during the day, at school and at home. However, some youths are harassed online exclusively (Ybarra & Mitchell, 2005). As much as 10% of youths have reported an online harassment or some form of threat and 14% have reported receiving a sexual solicitation (Mitchell et al., 2003). More recent research indicates that 19% of youths aged 10-17 reported an online sexual solicitation and 25% reported exposed to unwanted sexual materials (Cho & Cheon, 2005). Other studies have discovered much higher figures. For instance, Wolak (2007) found that nearly 66% of the total sample had been exposed to unwanted sexual materials. The large frequency of these victimizations illustrates the need for continued research aimed at assessing these aspects of family context.

One gap in the literature investigating the relationships among family context and Internet victimization is the limited number of measures of Internet victimization. Many studies have only looked at unwanted exposure to inappropriate materials and have failed to include measures of unwanted harassment and unwanted sexual solicitations. Studies including these two measurements have focused more on providing an estimation of rates and have not tried to look at the associations with other variables. These types of victimizations may be less common than unwanted exposure but are much more serious and problematic for youths.

Cho and Cheon's (2005) family social context model is limited because it only measured unwanted exposure to negative content and not harassment and sexual solicitations. Unwanted exposure to negative Internet content was conceptualized as unintentionally witnessing violent online games, sexually explicit websites, and online gambling (Cho & Cheon, 2005). Their findings also indicated that family cohesion was associated with lower exposure to unwanted content. In a more recent study, Finkelhor (2007) found that elevated depression scores and experiences of parental victimizations were common occurrences for youths reporting unwanted exposure. It could be very likely that these other instances of abuse by parents lead to emotional troubles and increased rates of Internet victimization. This is similar to Shields and

Cichetti's (2001) finding that parental abuse is associated with a higher risk of peer abuse. It is very likely that Internet predators will recognize the signs that school yard bullies perceive in youths who internalize the label of victim. Youths who are depressed and seeking attention from people online may be more at risk for victimization. Predators may recognize these "victimized" youths and try to offer them the support and emotional caring they are not receiving at home.

This tactic of Internet predators is referred to as 'grooming' and several studies indicate that grooming is the most common form of solicitation youths report. Grooming involves gaining the trust of the youth by offering emotional support and even gifts, with the intention of lowering the youths' inhibitions so a sexual relationship can take place.

Parental communication is also associated with certain types of Internet victimization. Fleming et al. (2006) studied unwanted exposure and found that there was a youth age and parental discussions interaction effect. The findings indicated that younger children and children who had not discussed Internet safety with parents were at the greatest risk. However, the relationship between safety discussions and exposure rates was significant on its own. Youths who had Internet discussions with parents used safer online practices than teens that had not and reported fewer unwanted exposures (Fleming, Greentree, Cocotti-Muller, Elias, & Morrison, 2006). The association between parental

communication and online harassment and solicitations needs to be addressed in future research.

Research Hypotheses

My research attempts to build upon research studying the effects of family context on Internet victimization. With the steady changing nature of the Internet, research needs to be aimed at uncovering the situations that place youths at increased risk of victimization. My aim is to explore the family context and other types of victimization relationships found in past research, but for Internet victimization. The features of the relationships being studied include family conflict, parental monitoring, and parental abuse. I will also explore two types of Internet victimization outcomes that have been relatively understudied, online harassment and sexual solicitations. Most previous studies have been interested primarily in unwanted exposure to negative Internet content. I hope to show that family context can have a profound effect on youth Internet victimization.

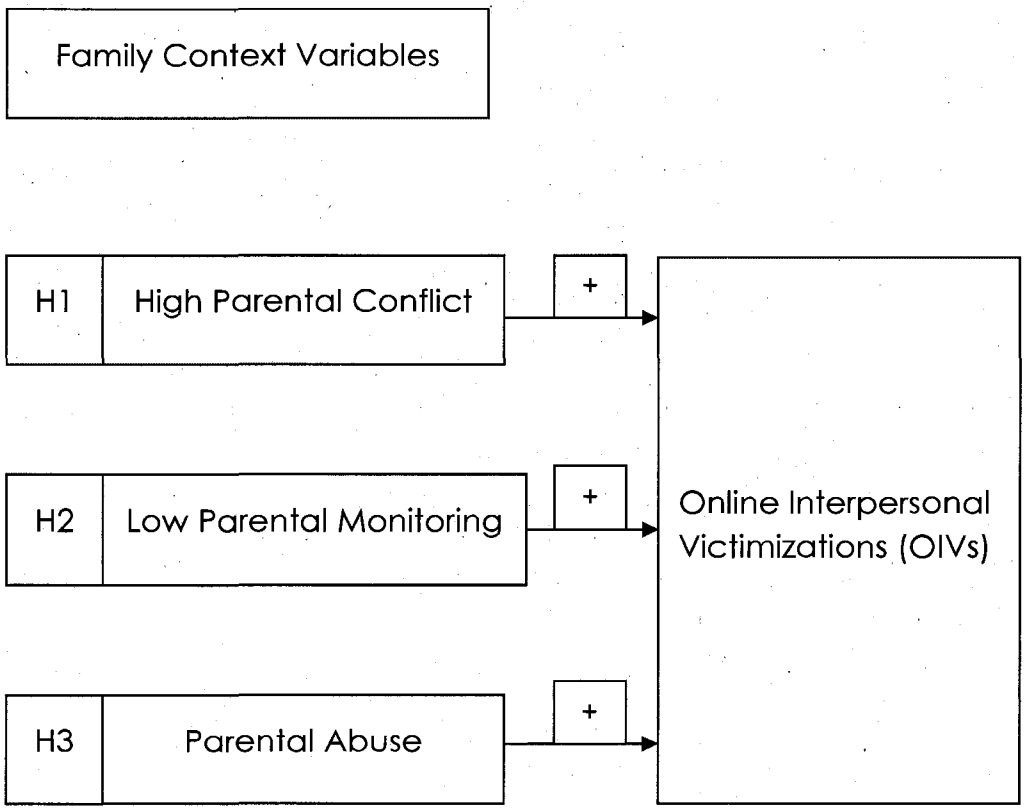
The causal model that follows the list of hypotheses shows the anticipated direction of each relationship, as well as the expected associations among the variables I have chosen for this analysis. Based on this model for Internet Victimization, several hypotheses have been formulated:

(1) Hypothesis one: There is a positive relationship between high parental conflict and Internet victimization while controlling for background variables.

(2) Hypothesis two: There is a positive relationship between low parental monitoring and Internet victimization while controlling for background variables.

(3) Hypothesis three: There is a positive relationship between parental abuse and Internet victimization while controlling for background variables.

Causal Model



CHAPTER II

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODS

Sample

My research utilizes data from the Youth Internet Safety Survey (YISS-2), the youth telephone questionnaire and the parent telephone questionnaire. The Youth Internet Safety Survey is a nationally representative, probability sample of adolescents aged 10-17, who report regular Internet use, and their parents. My research uses a cross-sectional design. Longitudinal analysis is impossible with the YISS because participants in the two waves are completely different. YISS-2 data was chosen because it is more recent, it obtains parental context measures by asking youths, and has more measures of parental monitoring than YISS-1.

The original sampling frame of the YISS was derived from a previous study. Phone Numbers were derived from the Second National Incidence Study of Missing, Abducted, Runaway, and Thrownaway Children (NISMART-2). NISMART-2 is another nationally representative telephone survey conducted by the Institute for Survey Research at Temple University. Households that were identified as having at least one child between 10 and 17 years of age during the NISMART2 adult screening process were

flagged as possible YISS selections. In total, 6,594 phone numbers were forwarded to YISS investigators. All phone numbers received by the YISS from NISMART 2 were dialed and successful contact was made with 3,446 households by the end of the survey period. Seventy-five percent of those households contacted completed the eligibility screen, 72% of which were identified as eligible for YISS participation. Finally, 82% (N=1,500) of eligible households completed both the adult and youth portions of the survey.

YISS interviews were conducted via telephone by Schulman, Ronca, and Bucuvals, Inc. (SRBI), a national survey research firm. Once contact was made with a household, the interviewers requested to speak with an adult. Interviews continued provided that the household had at least one child between the ages of 10 and 17. Adults were informed that the purpose of the interview was to assess characteristics of youth Internet use. The adult was told that the study was sponsored by the Crimes against Children Research Center (CCRC) at the University of New Hampshire and was federally funding by the US Department of Justice. After providing informed consent, the adult most familiar with the child's Internet use was interviewed. In households where there were more than one youth in the appropriate age range who used the Internet, the youth who used the Internet most often was chosen to participate in the study. At the close of the parental survey, which lasted 5 to 10 minutes on average, the

interviewer asked if the child could also participate. Confidentiality was ensured, and the adult was informed that questions would ask about sexual material that their child may have viewed. Compensation for participation in the survey was $10. The youth interview was scheduled at the convenience of the child, when he or she felt able to talk freely and confidentially. Youths were told that any question that made them uncomfortable could be skipped. Youth participants were mailed Internet safety brochures and were paid $10 for their participation in the survey. Verbal consent from both adult and child were required for the youth interviews. The youth interview lasted 15 to 20 minutes, on average.

The second installment of the Youth Internet Safety Survey was conducted between March and June of 2005 in an effort to assess and detail youth experiences on the Internet. The survey took place 5 years after the YISS-1 survey and used many improved measures, and a completely new sample of Internet users. The study aimed to quantify experiences of online harassment, unwanted exposure to sexual material, and unwanted sexual solicitations (Ybarra & Mitchell, 2004). Participants were regular Internet users who had used the Internet at least once a month for the past 6 months from any location, and the caregiver in the house self-identified as the one most knowledgeable about the youths' Internet usage (69.1% female caregivers). The broad definition of 'regular Internet use' allowed for the inclusion of a wide range of Internet users,

from relatively low to high. Location of the Internet access was similarly broad and allowed for the inclusion of youths who used the Internet from their home, school, library, friend's house, or any other location.

The final sample of the survey consisted of 1,500 youths. Ages of the youth participants included in the study ranged from 10 to 17 (M = 14.14). Slightly more than half of the participants were female (51%), and non-Hispanic whites were the most reported racial group (76%). The overwhelming majority of youths (89%) reported to having access to the Internet in their homes. The mean household income for 2004, as reported by parents was over $75,000; this was reported by 33% of the sample. Highly educated, wealthy families and White individuals were over-represented in the YISS-2 sample compared to the national average, but are generally reflective of the typical survey concerning youth Internet populations (Wolak et al., 2007).

Measures

Independent Variables

Conflict. Youths were asked to report conflicts with parents. I conceptualize parental conflict as the opposite of parental attachment. Questions asked youths how often their parents: 1) yelled at them? (1-4), 2) took away their privileges? (1-4), and 3) nagged them? (1-4). Responses to these questions were measured using a 4-point Likert type scale with

values ranging from "Never/Rarely" = 1 to "All the time" = 4. A composite scale of parental conflict was then created by summing the means of all three responses, dividing by three, and recoding the values into whole numbers. Reliability assessments indicated that all three measures were fairly correlated ($\alpha = 0.65$). Due to low numbers of youth with higher parental conflict scores, youths who reported parental conflict that was one standard deviation above the mean ($M=3.98$) were coded as "high parental conflict" =1, and the rest were coded "low parental conflict" = 0.

Monitoring. Parents were asked to report the use of certain types of software that monitored their children online. Parents were first asked if there was any software on the computer most used by the youths that blocked their usage in some way. They were then asked about the functions of the software. The questions asked whether or not the software: 1) monitored the youth's online activities? (yes/no), 2) limited the amount of time youth's spent online? (yes/no), 3) blocked personal information from being posted or e-mailed? (yes/no), 4) blocked or controlled the use of chat rooms, e-mail, newsgroups, or instant messaging? (yes/no), and 5) used a browser or search engine intended just for kids? (yes/no). Parents who answered yes to three or fewer questions were coded "low parental monitoring" = 1 and parents who answered yes to four or more were coded "high parental monitoring" = 0.

Abuse. Youths were asked to report the presence of parental abuse. The question asked the youths if they had been abused by a parent at home in the previous 12 months. This variable is dichotomously coded as "No Abuse" = 0 "Yes" = 1.

Dependent Variables

Online interpersonal victimization (OIV). The term online interpersonal victimization is a combination of several types of unwanted Internet experiences. The term was developed by Mitchell et al. (2007a), in an article concerned with the relationship between depression, delinquency, substance abuse and online victimization. The main two things that it measured were experiences of harassment and sexual solicitations. To measure the experience of sexual solicitations, youths were asked three questions about online encounters. The questions were as follows: 1) did anyone on the Internet try to talk to you about sex when you did not want to? (yes/no), 2) did anyone on the Internet ask you for sexual information about yourself that you did not want to answer? (yes/no), and finally 3) did anyone on the Internet ask you to do sexual things that you did not want to do? (yes/no). To measure the experience of harassment, youths were asked two questions: 1) did you ever feel worried or threatened because someone was bothering or harassing you online? (yes/no), and 2) did anyone ever use the Internet to threaten or embarrass you by posting or sending messages about you for other

people to see? (yes/no). This variable was dichotomously coded with "no OIV" = 0 and "any OIV" = 1.

Control Variables

Internet & Demographic Characteristics. The majority of these measurements were reported by youths. The remaining measures were reported by parents. A detailed description of each variables measurement will follow.

Total Use. Total Internet use was measured by asking youths about their daily and weekly Internet use. Weekly Internet use was measured by asking youths, on average, how many days a week they used the Internet. Responses to this question were measured using a 7-point Likert type scale with each value corresponding to the number of days youths used the Internet. Daily Internet use was measured by asking youths, on average, how many hours a day they used the Internet. Responses to this question were measured using an 11-point Likert type scale with values ranging from "1 hour or less" = 1 and "10+ hours" = 11. Weekly use was dropped from data analysis due to a low number of responses. For the purpose of my analyses, youths were placed into two groups, low use and high use. Youths who used the Internet for less than 3 hours in a typical day were coded "low use" = 0 and youths who used the Internet for over 3 hours (1 standard deviation above the mean, M=1.99) were coded as "high use" = 1. I chose to code Internet use into two groups because previous studies

of Internet use behavior using three groups have discovered that "low" and "moderate" Internet users are relatively similar.

Experience. Youths were asked to report how much experience they had using the Internet. Responses to this question were measured using a 5-point Lykert type scale. Responses ranged from 1 to 5 and represented all experience levels, from Internet beginners to Internet experts. Youths were separated into two groups, values of 1 to 3 were coded "low experience" = 0 and values of 4 or 5 were coded "high experience" = 1.

Importance. Youths were asked to report how important the Internet was in their lives. Responses to this question were measured using a 5-point Lykert type scale. Responses ranged from 1 to 5 and represented all importance levels, from not at important to very important. Youths were separated into two groups, values of 1 to 3 were coded "low importance" = 0 and values of 4 or 5 were coded "high importance" = 1.

Location. Youths were asked to report where they most commonly used the Internet. Responses ranged from at home, at school, at friends houses, on a cell phone, or any other place. This variable was coded as "all other places" = 0 and "At home" = 1.

Gender. Parents were asked to report the gender of their child. Gender of the youth was coded as "male" = 0 and "female" = 1.

Age. Parents were asked to report the age of their child. This variable was continuous with ages ranging from 10 to 17.

White. Youths were asked to report their race. The question was open-ended, allowing youths to potentially respond to several racial categories. Responses were coded verbatim. This variable was coded as "Not White" = 0 for any youth not indicating White as one of his/her races and "White" = 1.

Hispanic. Youths were also asked to report their Ethnicity. This variable was coded as "Not Hispanic or Latino" = 0 and "Hispanic or Latino" = 1.

Income. Parents were asked to report the family's gross income in 2004 in thousands. Responses ranged from 1 to 4 and represented discrete categories of income: under $20,000, $20,000-50,000, $50,000-75,000, and more than $75,000. Due to a large number of missing values (N=123) from respondents answering Don't Know, Not Ascertainable, or Refused, a dummy variable "No Income" was created to ensure that a high number cases were included in bivariate and multivariate analyses. Respondents with who did not report their income did not appear to significantly differ from respondents who did report their income. The missing values were inserted into the original 'income' variable at the median (Median = 3; $50,000-75,000).

No Income. This variable was dichotomously coded with "Any income reported" = 0 and "no income reported" = 1.

Parents Married. Parents were asked to report their marital status. Responses ranged from married, divorced, separated, single/never married, and widowed. This variable was coded "Not Married" = 0 "Married" = 1.

Limitations

My research is crucial because it examines many family characteristic of youth Internet victims, but it also has limitations. First, the data I used are cross-sectional. There is no way of knowing if OIVs occurred before, during, or after conflicts with parents, parental abuse, or attempts to monitor Internet use. There is also no way of measuring how long conflict and abuse had been taking place. These events could be short-term problems or serious on-going ones.

Second, the sample over-represents highly educated, highly prosperous families and White individuals compared to the national average. Although the sample is reflective of the typical Internet household at the time of data collection, this study provided little insight into the victimization circumstances of youths from lower-income and minority families.

Third, since my focus was on family context, and left out the potential impact of peers on Internet victimization. Peer influences may be associated with victimizations that occur when youths use the Internet outside of their home. Peers may also influence Internet behavior at any location when they are browsing the Internet together. Future research should focus on peer influences as they may be associated with Internet victimization in many ways.

Fourth, some measurements of variable were imperfect. Specifically, the measure of parental monitoring is not ideal. I would have preferred a measure of overall monitoring of youth behavior, not just the existence of computer software. For the purpose of these analyses, this measure served as a proxy of parental monitoring. I would recommend that future analyses use a more valid measure of parental monitoring. The measure of parental abuse yielded such a small percentage of youths that it may not be generalizable to the youth Internet population. By only asking youth's one question about parental abuse, certain aspects could be under-reported. Finkelhor (2005) found that 14% of the sample had been abused by parents. Several detailed questions about parental abuse may elicit more responses.

Other variables that have been found to be associated with Internet victimization were dropped from this analysis due to poor measurement. The YISS-2 had no measures of Internet safety discussions.

Future research should include better measures of Internet safety communication with parents.

Despite these limitations, my research takes an important step in discovering the associations between family context and youth Internet victimization. The study will hopefully generate important implications of how parents can keep their children safe from the dangers associated with the Internet.

Human Subjects

The instrument being utilize for my research, the second Youth Internet Safety Survey (YISS-2), has already been approved for several other research studies by the IRB at the University of New Hampshire. Participants of this survey were previously assured confidentiality and informed consent. Approval for my exempt study was granted by the University of New Hampshire Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects (IRB) in Research. A letter is attached in the appendix to verify that consent has been granted.

Data Analysis

Analysis

The original YISS-2 data set contained over 500 variables. The vast majority of these are not present in my analysis; many that were of no interest were dropped. Several original variables were combined to

create the scales of parental conflict, monitoring, and Interpersonal victimization. Approximately 15 variables remained for my analysis. The statistical package of choice for data analysis was SPSS 15.0.

Statistical Techniques

Univariate analyses. SPSS was used to assess frequencies and descriptive statistics of all the variables. Percentages of categorical variables were calculated, as well as pertinent descriptive measures of continuous level variables.

Bivariate analyses. A series of cross-tabulations including Chi-Square tests for independence were performed to examine the relationships among Online Interpersonal Victimizations (OIVs) and the control variables of Internet use, experience, importance, location, gender, race, ethnicity, marital status, age, and income. Chi-squares were then performed to examine the relationship among OIVs and the three independent variables of parental conflict, parental abuse, and parental monitoring.

Multivariate analyses. A total of three Logistic Regression models were performed to assess the relationship among OIVs and parental conflict, parental monitoring, and parental abuse, while controlling for all other variables. The dichotomization of the control and family context variables allowed for the calculation of risk ratios.

CHAPTER III

RESULTS

Descriptive Statistics

Univariate Analysis

Univariate analyses, in the form of frequency distributions, were performed on all categorical variables included in the analysis. Table 1 contains the frequency distributions of all variables. One in five youths (N=300) reported an online Interpersonal victimization. A relatively small percentage of youths (13.5%) reported high parental conflict. A relatively small percentage (12%) of youths had parents who were reported high monitoring. A very small percentage of youths (2%, N=31) reported abuse from a parent. Percentages of the remaining variables can be seen in Table 1.

Table 1: Selected variables from the Youth Internet Safety Survey

Variable	*Description/Frequency*
OIVs	Youths reporting an online interpersonal victimization: verbal harassment or sexual solicitation (20%).
Conflict	Youths reporting high parental conflict (13.5%).
Monitoring	Parents reporting low-monitoring of children: less than 3 software programs (87.5%).
Abuse	Youths reporting physical abuse at home (2.1%).
Total Use	Youths reporting high Internet use (27.1%).
Experience	Youths reporting high Internet experience (52.4%).
Importance	Youths reporting high Internet importance (33.7%).
Location	Youths reporting that the home is the most common place they use the Internet (76.3%).
Gender	Parents reporting that their child is female (50.7%).
Age	Parents reporting their child's age (range 10-17; mean= 14.24).
White	Youths reporting their race is white (76.1%).
Hispanic	Youths reporting Hispanic or Latino Ethnicity (8.9%).
Income	Parents reporting 2004 gross family income that exceeds $75,000 (32.9%).
Married	Parents reporting in-tact marriages (75.9%).

Univariate descriptive statistics were performed for all measurement level variables. Table 2 contains descriptive statistics of all the variables. Variables denoted with an "*" were recoded dichotomously, an explanations for the reasoning behind these decisions transform are briefly explained. The mean age of the sample was 14.24 with a range of 10 to 17. Age was negatively skewed and asymmetrical. The median income was 3 ($50,000 to 75,000) before the missing values of 'no income reported' (N=123) were inserted in. Income was also negatively skewed and asymmetrical.

Conflict was positively skewed and asymmetrical. As mentioned, parental conflict was recoded to a categorical variable with high conflict representing those youths with a parental conflict score of 5 or higher. Weekly use was dropped due to a high number of missing cases. Daily use was used to recode the total use variable. Internet Expertise and Internet importance were both recoded into low and high groups for youths answering four or five to each question, youths coded as high experience and high importance were roughly one standard deviation above the mean of each variable.

Table 2: Summary Statistics for Measurement Level Variables

Variables	N	Mean	Median	Min	Max	Skewness
Age	1500	14.24	15	10	17	-0.378
Income	1500	2.9	3	1	4	-0.351
Conflict*	1500	3.98	4	2	9	0.623
Weekly Use*	1375	4.44	4	1	7	-0.087
Daily Use*	1497	1.99	2	1	11	2.56
Experience*	1488	3.53	4	1	5	-0.316
Importance*	1495	3.1	3	1	5	0.084

* Continuous variables before recoding to categorical.

Bivariate Analysis

Relationships among control variables and OIVs. I performed cross-tabulations of the relationships among OIVs and all of the control variables in the analysis, using a series of Chi-squares. Table 3 contains chi-square values for all the bivariate relationships. To summarize the important findings, high Internet use ($x^2 = 22.39$, 1df, $p<.001$), high experience ($x^2 = 7.94$, 1df, $p<.01$), high importance ($x^2 = 16.79$, 1df, $p<.001$), female gender ($x^2 = 29.13$, 1df, $p<.001$), divorce ($x^2 = 3.9$, 1df, $p<.05$) were all associated with reporting of an OIV. It appeared that high Internet users, highly-experienced users, youths who valued the Internet, females, and youths with divorced parents were more likely to report an OIV. On the contrary, low Internet users, low-experience users, low-importance users, males, and youths with married parents were less likely to report an

OIV. There was no association among Internet location, white, Hispanic, and reports of an OIV.

Several One Way Analyses of Variance (ANOVA's) were performed to assess the relationship of the two measurement-level variables, age and income, and OIVs. Table 3 contains the F-ratios of these ANOVAS. The analysis revealed that age was associated with reporting of an OIV. Specifically, older youths were more likely to report an OIV than younger youths ($F=5.31$, $p>.001$). Youths aged 14 to 17 showed the largest differences from the 10 and 11 year old youths ($p<.05$). The ages with the highest means were 15 (0.25) and 16 (0.26) year olds and the lowest means were for the 10 (0.04) and 11 (0.09) year olds. There was no association among the five categories of income and reporting of an OIV. A chi-square analysis was then performed to assess the relationship of no Income and OIVs. Again, there was association.

Relationships among family context variables and OIVs. Table 4 contains chi-square values for all the bivariate relationships. High parental conflict was associated with reporting of an OIV. Youths who reported high parental conflict were significantly more likely to report being a victim of an OIV ($x^2 = 35.7$, $p<.001$). Thirty-six percent of youths who reported high parental conflict (N=202) also reported an OIV, as compared to eighteen percent of youths who reported low parental conflict.

Parental abuse was also associated with reporting of an OIV. Youths who reported parental abuse were significantly more likely to report being a victim of an OIV ($x^2 = 19.9$, $p<.001$). More than half of the youths who reported abuse from parents (N=31) also reported an OIV, compared to the nineteen percent of youths who reported no parental abuse. This means that one out of every two youths who are abused by their parents is also abused on the Internet.

Low Monitoring was associated with OIV reporting, although in the opposite direction hypothesized. Youths coded as highly monitored, actually reported more victimizations youths coded as lowly monitored ($x^2 = 7.1$, $p<.05$). This association may be taking place because parents have installed monitoring software because after their child had been the victim of an OIV.

Table 3: Cross Tabulations of Control Variables with OIVs

Demographics	Reported OIV					
	No	Yes	N	x^2	F	p<
High Use	72%	28%	407	22.4		**0.001**
Low Use	83%	17%	1093			
High Experience	77%	23%	786	7.94		**0.01**
Low Experience	83%	17%	714			
High Importance	74%	26%	505	16.8		**0.001**
Low Importance	83%	17%	995			
Female	74%	26%	760	29.1		**0.001**
Male	85%	14%	738			
Location-Home	79%	21%	1144	1.2		ns
Location-Other	82%	18%	282			
Race-White	80%	20%	1141	0.6		ns
Race-Other	79%	21%	359			
Hispanic	77%	23%	133	0.6		ns
Non-Hispanic	80%	20%	1367			
Married	81%	19%	1139	3.9		**0.05**
Not Married	76%	24%	352			
Age			1500		5.31	**0.001**
Income			1500		1.833	ns
No Income*	83%	17%	123	0.72		ns
Income	80%	20%	1377			

0 cells (0%) have expected count less than 5.

Table 4: Cross Tabulations of Family Variables with OIVs

Family Variables	Reported OIV				
	No	Yes	N	x^2	p<
High Conflict	64%	36%	202	35.7	**0.001**
Low Conflict	82%	18%	1298		
Low Monitoring	81%	19%	1313	7.1	**0.05**
High Monitoring	73%	27%	187		
Abuse	48%	52%	31	19.9	**0.001**
None	81%	19%	1467		

0 cells (0%) have expected count less than 5.

Multivariate Analysis

Multiple Logistic regression models were performed to test the hypotheses that there are associations among the three family context variables and online interpersonal victimization. Results are presented in Table 5. Model 1 examined the relationships among demographic variables, Internet control variables, and online Interpersonal victimization. Model 2 examined the relationships among parental conflict, monitoring, and abuse and online interpersonal victimization, while controlling for all other variables. Model 3 examined the relationships among parental conflict, monitoring, and abuse and online interpersonal victimization, with the exclusion of several non-significant control variables from model 2.

Model 1. In the initial model, age and gender were associated with OIVs. The relationship with age indicated that for every increase in age of a year, the likelihood of reporting an OIV increases by 18% (odds ratio

[OR]: 1.18). Females had more than twice the risk of reporting an OIV ([OR]: 2.03). All non-significant odds ratios for the variables married, White, Hispanic, experience, importance, Internet use, and location are contained in Table 5.

Model 2. All controls variables were included in Model 2, including location, White, and Hispanic, none of which were significant at the bivariate level. Non-significant in Model 1 that were significant at the bivariate level were included. These variables include; married, Internet use, experience, importance. All three independent variables, high parental conflict, low parental monitoring, and parental abuse were added to the equation in Model 2.

Age and gender were still associated with OIVs in Model 2. The odds ratios of these three variables remained virtually unchanged from Model 1, 2.02 for gender and 1.17 for age and the levels of significance were unchanged as well. When the control variables were accounted for, all three independent variables were associated with online interpersonal victimization. Experiencing high parental conflict had more than twice the risk of reporting an OIV ([OR]: 2.19). Being abused by parents more than tripled the risk of reporting an OIV ([OR]: 3.10). Being highly monitored increased the risk of reporting an OIV by 40% ([OR]: 0.60). This model indicates that there are associations among parental conflict, parental monitoring, and parental abuse and online interpersonal victimizations.

These relationships are significant net all of other variables (t=-4.361, p<.001). The R^2 for model 2 was 0.07, meaning that 7.9% of the variance in online interpersonal victimization was explained by the variables in this regression model.

Model 3. In model 3, the non-significant variables from model 2; married, white, Hispanic and Internet location; were excluded from the analysis. I kept several control variables pertaining to Internet use; experience, importance, and use; although not-significant in Model 2. The associations among age and gender remained virtually unchanged through all three models. All three family context variables remained significant, as well. Parental conflict and abuse remained the two best predictors of online interpersonal victimization. High parental conflict more than doubles the likelihood of reporting OIV ([OR]: 2.18) and being abused by parents more than triples the likelihood of reporting OIV ([OR]: 3.34). High monitoring still increased the likelihood of reporting an OIV by 40%. These models clearly indicate that family context is associated with OIVs. Poor relationships with parents, those with high conflict and abuse, significantly increase the risk of experiencing an online interpersonal victimization.

Table 5: Logistic Regression of Family Context Variable on OIVs

Predictor	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Gender	**2.032*** **	**2.024*** **	**2.004*** **
Age	**1.179*** **	**1.169*** **	**1.155*** **
Income	0.864	0.877	
No Income	0.693	0.681	
Married	1.272	1.214	
Experience	1.081	1.079	1.079
Importance	1.343	1.343	1.318
White	0.947	1.049	
Hispanic	1.16	1.164	
Internet Use	1.292	1.263	1.259
Location	0.842	0.878	
Conflict		**2.188*** **	**2.177*** **
Abuse		**3.117** **	**3.334** **
Monitoring		**0.603** **	**0.593** **
N	1489	1487	1496
R^2	0.056	0.08	0.072

**p< 0.01, ***p< 0.001

CHAPTER IV

DISCUSSION

I have argued throughout this paper that family context can significantly influence youth outcomes, especially with respect to online interpersonal victimization. Specifically, poor relationships with parents can significantly increase the chances that youths will be victims of online harassment or sexual solicitations.

Routine activity and lifestyles theory argues that when parents do not properly monitor and protect their children, victimization is much more likely to take place. The key variables in my research representing this theory are high Internet use, non-intact family structure, and poor parental monitoring. According to this theory, online interpersonal victimization would be most likely to occur when a youth is exposed to more opportunities to be victimized due to high Internet use, and less likely to be protected due to low monitoring by their parents. Finkelhor (1997) suggested that routine activities theory is a better predictor of several types of victimization more in boys than in girls, because boys are more likely to be engaging in risky behaviors. With respect to the Internet, these

risky behaviors could include doing things that their parents would not approve of, for example going to age restricted web-sites or having conversation with unknown people. Engaging in risky behaviors could increase the likelihood of experiencing an OIV.

The Family Social Context suggests that parents impact their children's use of the Internet since they interact with them on a day-to-day basis. According to this theory, online interpersonal victimization is most likely to take place when there is high family conflict and low monitoring. When parental conflict is high and parental monitoring is low, victimization is much more likely to occur.

In my model of family context, I included parental abuse with parental conflict and parental monitoring, because I believe it is another measure of parent to child relationships. It found that it was associated with Internet victimization. Parental abuse does not coincide with open communication or adequate guardianship. The literature on parental abuse suggests that "victim" labels are often adopted by abused youths' which increases their risk of several types of victimization. These children are bullied because victimizers recognize their anxiety and heightened arousal. They may be at increased risk of Internet victimization because children who feel alienated may try to get attention they do not receive at home from other sources.

Initially, there was limited support for some of the tenets of Routine Activities Theory at the bivariate level. With respect to exposure, high Internet users were significantly more likely than low users to report an OIV. About one in three high Internet users reported an OIV, compared to one in five low Internet users. This suggests that increased exposure to potential Internet victimizers may lead to increased risk of being victimized. Past research studies has found that high Internet use is indicative of higher victimization, either alone (specifically victimization from cyberbullying; Hinduja & Patchin, 2008), or through the forming of close online relationships (Wolak, Mitchell, & Finkelhor, 2003). In multivariate analysis however, there was no relationship between high use and OIV. High Internet use did not predict online interpersonal victimization in any of the regression models.

There was also limited support for the importance of family structure. The difference was relatively small, but was still significant at the $p<.05$ level. One in five youths from intact families experienced an OIV compared to one in four youths with divorced parents. These results indicate that having unmarried parents may lead to increased risk of victimization. Perhaps youths with unmarried parents have poorer relationships with their parents and are less likely to be cared for and monitored, which places them at risk for victimization. However, when the family context variables were added to the regression models, the

relationship with family structure disappeared. Past research has found convergent findings, indicating that parental structure is far less important than the quality of relationships. Research on other types of victimization has found that youths in single-parent families and step-families are more vulnerable to victimization, with problems in step families being more related to family problems (Turner, Finkelhor, & Ormrod, 2007).

After the initial data analysis, I performed two chi-square analyses to determine if family structure was indeed associated with parental abuse and conflict at the bivariate level. Both abuse and high conflict were associated with higher risk of victimization (data not shown). Nearly half all abused children came from non-intact families, even children from non-intact families comprised less than one quarter of the total sample ($x^2=10.2$, $p<0.01$). In addition, one third of youths who reported parental conflict came from non-intact families compared to one fifth of the youths from intact families ($x^2=6.1$, $p<0.01$). These finding indicate that within non-intact family structures, it is the high levels of conflict and abuse that explain the association with higher risk of victimization.

The relationship between parental monitoring and OIV is a challenging one to explain. I hypothesized that low monitoring would lead to higher victimization, because without parental monitoring, youths could do what they pleased on the Internet and would probably engage in riskier behaviors than if they were monitored. The opposite relationship

emerged, however. Higher monitoring was actually associated with higher victimization. The same inverse relationship appeared in both regression models. It appears that the presence of blocking software was of limited influence in protecting youths from online harassment or solicitations. Other authors have noted that blocking software filters out a fair percentage of unwanted exposure, but is from solving the problem completely (Mitchell et al., 2003; Fleming et al., 2006).

This association could appear because parents may have installed software if they suspected that their youths may be engaging in risky online behaviors, if they had low levels of trust in their child's ability to use the Internet responsibly (Mitchell et al., 2005a), or if an incident of victimization had already taken place. There is no way to establish the temporal order in these instances. This further illustrates the need for improved measures of parental monitoring.

The routine activities framework is also incapable of explaining Internet victimization, since females are more prone to this specific type of victimization. This theory suggests that boys are at greater at risk of victimization. However, female gender was a significant predictor of online interpersonal victimization through all stages of data analysis. Past research indicates that males are more frequently the victims of conventional bullying (Ybarra & Mitchell, 2004), but that gender differences do not exist in Internet bullying and harassment (Hinduja &

Patchin, 2008; Li, 2006). In terms of sexual solicitations, females are more frequently the victim, (Mitchell et al., 2007a; Mitchell et al., 2007b; Wells & Mitchell, 2007) and are more often the victims of Internet-initiated sexual crimes (Wolak et al., 2008). These findings indicate that when the two measures of interpersonal victimization (harassment and sexual solicitations) are combined, females are more commonly the victim.

The family social context model offered a better explanation of the predictors of online interpersonal victimization. There was much more support for the variables of parental conflict and abuse. Both parental conflict and parental abuse were significant at the bivariate level. Two out of five youths who reported high conflict reported an OIV compared to one in five of youths who reported low conflict. The relationship between abuse and OIV was even more pronounced. More than half of youth who reported abuse also reported an OIV compared to one in five of youths who reported no abuse.

Once conflict and abuse were added to the regression models, only two of the six variables that were associated with OIV at the bivariate level remained significant. Females and older youths were still significantly higher in their reporting of online interpersonal victimizations, however, they were not as good at predicting victimization as parental conflict or abuse. The odds ratios of gender and age actually became smaller once

the family context variables were included. High parental conflict doubled the risk of being victimized and abuse more than tripled the risk.

The four control variable that were significant at the bivariate level, married, experience, importance, and use, were unable to account for the variation victimization risk. The relationship between Internet experience and OIV indicates that youths with a good understanding of the Internet works were more likely to be victimized. In regression models, age seemed to be the better indicator of Internet experience with respect to victimization outcomes. Wolak (2008) dispelled myths that young naïve youths being more prone to victimization. She explained that as youths get older, gain more Internet experience, and begin engaging in more complex online use, they are putting themselves at greater risk of victimization than younger, less experienced youths. This suggests that perhaps age is the better indicator of Internet experience.

The relationship between Internet importance and total use and OIV indicates that youths who value the Internet and use it frequently are more likely to be victimized. It makes logical sense that those who use the Internet regularly would place high value upon it. After preliminary data analysis, I found these two variables to be highly correlated ($r=0.62$, $p<0.01$). These associations disappeared with the addition of the family context variables to the regression models. The various measures of youth Internet behavior initially appeared to be indicators of increased

victimization risk, but were not as significant as the measures of family context.

Race, ethnicity and location of most Internet use were not significant predictors of victimization risk at any level. In his analysis of cyberbullying, Hinduja (2008) discovered that race and location of the most common computer use were not associated with cyberbullying. A measure of the location of all computers used could reveal differences in victimization should be included in future research. Other studies have found that the use of the Internet via cell phones is related to cyberbullying (Chibbaro, 2007), and aggressive sexual solicitations (Mitchell et al., 2007b).

My analysis revealed that parental conflict significantly increased the risk of online interpersonal victimization. High conflict parental relationships; relationships in which youths are stripped of their privileges, nagged, and yelled at; significantly increase the risks of victimization. Research investigating at youths who form close online relationships discovered that youth who have difficult relationships with their parents are at increased risk of online sexual exploitation (Wolak et al., 2003). Relationships with low conflict; with good cohesion or attachment, and in which parents take an interest in what their children are doing online; can significantly reduce the risks of victimization. Wolak (2003) speculated that

youths who communicated well with their friends and family had a source of support and someone to talk to about their online encounters.

The relationships between parental conflict and OIV could also be related to involvement in risky behaviors, both on and offline. Parents may be yelling at their children and taking away privileges because they are engaging in inappropriate behaviors. Since my research had no measure of off-line or general risky youth behavior, it is impossible to know this. Wolak (2008) did find that youths who engaged in several online risky behaviors were much more likely to report an OIV. Wells (2008) found that youths who exhibited risky behavior were more vulnerable to increased exposure to both online and offline threatening situations.

Risky behaviors could precede OIVs and parental conflict. However, Wells and Mitchell (2007) found that in a sample of online sexual exploitation victims seeking help from mental health professionals, co-occurring parent-child conflict were common for a high proportion of females (83%, N=101) and males (81%, N=31) (Wells & Mitchell, 2007). This study also included a measure of youth disciplinary problems. If disciplinary problems from risky behaviors are related to victimization, co-occurring disciplinary problems should be as common as parent-child conflict. However, co-occurring disciplinary problems were reported by only 47% of females and 58% of males. It appears a large number of

youths who report parental conflict that is not related to behavioral issues. This is further proof that parental conflict is related to Internet victimization.

Parental physical abuse was associated with an even larger increase of victimization risk than parental conflict. Past research has suggested that physical abuse from parents can lead to compromised emotional reactions and the internalization of the victim label (Shields & Cichetti, 2001), elevated levels of isolation and depression (Mitchell et al., 2007b), anxiety and phobias (Wells & Mitchell, 2007; Shields & Cicchetti, 2001), the development of risky sexual behavior that in turn invites sexual advances (Wolak et al., 2008), and feelings of alienation from the parents that cause youths to not seek advice or guidance (Shreck & Fisher, 2004), all of increase vulnerability to victimization. Similarly, youths who report being troubled; a measure of high depression and offline victimizations; were much more likely to form close online relationships, increasing vulnerability to online exploitation (Wolak et al., 2003).

The relationship between monitoring and OIVs are difficult to explain. I had originally conceptualized parental monitoring as a measure of parents involvement in their children's lives, not merely the presence of online software. The variable used in these analyses was merely a proxy of the effort parents' put forth to ensure the safety of their children. Future research should obtain a better measure of parental monitoring. It should measure how often the parents talk to their children about what goes on

in their life, including, but not limited their Internet use. The evidence clearly indicates that more than computer software is needed to keep youths safe from the various dangers of the Internet. Norman Oder (2003) was quoted for his analogy of how to protect kids using the Internet; "Swimming pools can be dangerous for children. To protect them, one can install locks, put up fences, and deploy pool alarms...but by far the most important thing that one can is to teach them to swim."

My research offers only a glimpse at the ways in which parents can keep children safe on the Internet and truly illustrates the need for more research aimed at discovering what other mechanisms place children in danger from online harassment and solicitations. There were some limitations of my research. The first limitation was the use of cross-sectional analysis which does not provide insight about causality of relationships. The second limitation is the measurement of parental monitoring. Future research should include improved measures of this variable. Third, there were no measures of peer influences, only family. Since peer influences have been found to be associated with delinquency and violent victimizations delinquency research, it is likely that they may be associated with Internet victimization as well. Similarly, there is no measure of other conflict with other family members. Conflict or abuse from other family members may be associated with Internet victimization. Sibling conflict, especially bullying or sexual abuse could be related to online

bullying and sexual solicitations. Future research should include these measures of family conflict and abuse. Engagement in delinquent activities should be measured as well. Every aspect of a youths' life must be explored if we are to truly understand everything placing them at risk for online interpersonal victimization.

Aside from the limitations of this study, the results found here do show the impact parents can have on their children's risk of Internet victimization. Parents can protect their children by maintaining a relationship with by open, respectful communication, proper monitoring, interest in the child's day to day activities, and an absence of emotional and physical abuse. The creation of these relationships is especially crucial to the safety of older youths and females. Education also needs to be provided to youths so that they can identify the warning signs of potential victimizers and solicitors. Proper communication with parents can help youths identify warning signs and feel more comfortable discussing them with parents.

Since the creation of these relationships is so crucial to the safety of youths, there should be an effort from schools, the community, and the media to promote them. Schools should provide youths and parents with Internet safety training. The collaboration of parents and kids will help increase knowledge of the Internet for both parties. Kids are often more educated than parents about the utility of the Internet, but awareness of

the risks are low for both youths and parents. By creating a platform of information and training for what to do in certain situations, hopefully the dialogue will continue to take place at home. The media should focus less on celebrated cases of victimization and devote attention to helping parents develop an interest in their children's online activities. It should encourage parents to monitor and communicate with their children. Finally, it should discourage youths from harassing their peers and divulging personal sexual information to others online.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: MEASURES

Online Interpersonal Victimization: Coded if responses of "yes" are given to any of the following 5 questions.

In the past year, did you ever feel worried or threatened because someone was bothering or harassing you online?

In the past year, did anyone ever use the Internet to threaten or embarrass you by posting or sending message about you for other people to see?

In the past year, did anyone on the Internet ever try to get you to talk online about sex when you did not want to?

In the past year, did anyone on the Internet ask you for sexual information about yourself when you did not want to answer such questions? I mean very personal questions, like what your body looks like or sexual things you have done.

In the past year, did anyone on the Internet ever ask you to do something sexual that you did not want to do?

1. Yes

2. No

Parental Conflict: Composite scale of the 3 following questions.

I'd like to ask you a couple questions about your relationship with your parent(s). First, how often [do/does] your [person in relate1] nag you? Would you say...?

How often [do/does] your [person in relate1] take away your privileges? Would you say...?

How often [do/does] your [person in relate1] yell at you? Would you say...?

1. All of the time

2. Most of the time

3. Sometimes

4. Never or rarely

Parental Monitoring: Parents are first asked:

At any time in the past year, has there been software on the computer your child uses at home that filters, block or monitors what your child does or sees online?

Those parents who answer yes to the above question are asked several follow up questions about the type of software they use and why they use it. Further coding results as responses of "yes" are given to any of the following 5 questions.

I have some questions about what types of blocking, filtering or monitoring software has been on the computer your child uses at home, including software you may have stopped using. In the past 12 months, has there been software that...

Blocks or controls your child's use of chat rooms, e-mail, newsgroups or instant messaging?

That monitors your child's online activities?

That limits the amount of time your child can spend online?

That blocks personal information from being posted or e-mailed?

That uses a browser or search engine just for kids?

Parental Abuse:

In the last year, did a grown-up taking care of you hit, beat, kick, or physically abuse you in some other way?

1. Yes
2. No

Weekly Internet Use:

How many days in a usual week do you use the Internet?

Daily Internet Use:

How many hours are you online on a usual <u>day</u> when you use the Internet?

1. I hour or less
2. More than 1 to 2 hours
3. More than 2 to 3 hours
4. More than 3 to 4 hours
5. More than 4 to 5 hours

6. More than 5 to 6 hours

7. More than 6 to 7 hours

8. More than 7 to 8 hours

9. More than 8 to 9 hours

10. More than 9 to 10 hours

11. More than 10 hours

Internet Experience:

How much experience do you have using the Internet, on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being a beginner and 5 being an expert?

Internet Importance:

How important is the Internet in your life, on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being not at all important and 5 being extremely important?

Internet Location:

Of the places you just mentioned [ ], in the past year. Where is the computer you use most often to get on the Internet?

1. Your home

2. Your school

3. A Friends home

4. Any other place, like a public library

Gender:

Is this child male or female?

Age:

How old is this child?

Race:

What would you say your race is?

1. American Indian, Aleut, Eskimo
2. Asian or Pacific Islander
3. Black
4. White
5. Other

Ethnicity:

Are you of Hispanic or Latino origin?

1. Yes
2. No

Income:

What would you say your total 2004 household income was?

1. Less than $20,000
2. $20,000 to $50,000
3. More than $50,000 to $75,000
4. More than $75,000

Family Structure:

What is your current marital status?

1. Married
2. Living with a partner
3. Separated
4. Divorced
5. Widowed
6. Single, never married

APPENDIX B: IRB APPROVAL LETTER

University *of* New Hampshire

Research Conduct and Compliance Services, Office of Sponsored Research
Service Building, 51 College Road, Durham, NH 03824-3585
Fax: 603-862-3564

17-Oct-2007

Hinchee, Brian
Sociology, Horton SSC
34 Lexington Street
Dover, NH 03820

IRB #: 4071
Study: Family Correlates of Children/Youths Experiencing Internet Victimization
Approval Date: 17-Oct-2007

The Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects in Research (IRB) has reviewed and approved the protocol for your study as Exempt as described in Title 45, Code of Federal Regulations (CFR), Part 46, Subsection 101(b). Approval is granted to conduct your study as described in your protocol.

Researchers who conduct studies involving human subjects have responsibilities as outlined in the attached document, *Responsibilities of Directors of Research Studies Involving Human Subjects.* (This document is also available at http://www.unh.edu/osr/compliance/irb.html.) Please read this document carefully before commencing your work involving human subjects.

Upon completion of your study, please complete the enclosed pink Exempt Study Final Report form and return it to this office along with a report of your findings.

If you have questions or concerns about your study or this approval, please feel free to contact me at 603-862-2003 or Julie.simpson@unh.edu. Please refer to the IRB # above in all correspondence related to this study. The IRB wishes you success with your research.

For the IRB,

Julie F. Simpson
Manager

cc: File
Finkelhor, David